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21 June 1984**JACK ANDERSON****U.S. Challenged
By the Kremlin
On High Seas**

Deep in the Pentagon's secret planning councils, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have come to the conclusion that a nuclear holocaust is not likely. The reason for their guarded optimism is that the Soviet leaders are too cautious and the United States is too strong.

The greater threat, according to our top military experts, would be limited military confrontations with conventional weapons. The Soviets, who for years have been the world's greatest land power, are challenging the United States for control of the seas.

It has been our carrier task forces that have given the U.S. Navy its power and reach. Not surprisingly, this is precisely where the Kremlin has decided to challenge us. After decades of neglect, the Soviets have seen that carriers are an effective means of extending their power.

The latest intelligence reports warn that the Soviets are building four new Nimitz-class carriers, nuclear-powered ships with conventional takeoff and landing capability. They are expected to be deployed before 1990. The carriers are likely

to have 60 to 70 planes, including MiG23s, an early-warning aircraft.

One secret Pentagon study estimates that by the year 2000 the Soviets may have nine aircraft carriers, including the four new ones.

The Soviet decision-making process on the carriers and what they hope to gain with the ships are revealed in highly classified intelligence reports and other studies reviewed by my associates Dale Van Atta and Donald Goldberg.

The Soviet navy's first proposal for an aircraft carrier came in 1925 but sank like a stone in the face of that country's overriding need for defensive measures against a supposedly hostile capitalist world. The proposal surfaced again in 1936; Stalin's admirals wanted a carrier with ice-breaking capability. In this period, a prestigious American company offered plans for three variations of a combined battleship-carrier.

The Soviets tried in vain to steal plans for the Nazis' aircraft carrier, Graf Zeppelin, before World War II. At the end of the war, the Soviets captured the incomplete German carrier, which had been scuttled but not destroyed.

The Soviets raised the carrier and studied it closely. But it either capsized while under tow to Leningrad laden with war booty or was used for target practice and sunk in the Gulf of Finland.

Stalin eventually ordered a medium-sized carrier built, but Khrushchev halted construction after Stalin's death. Khrushchev viewed carriers as floating dinosaurs vulnerable to nuclear missiles.

But with Khrushchev's abrupt departure in 1964, Leonid Brezhnev ordered full speed ahead. In 1976 the Soviets' first carrier, the Kiev, appeared in the Mediterranean. As a Defense Intelligence Agency report interpreted Brezhnev's thinking, "an aircraft carrier would be militarily advantageous and politically useful," giving the Soviets "another of the trappings of great-power status."

Although the CIA pronounced the Soviets' Kiev-class carriers "no military match for U.S. attack carriers," the new Soviet carriers are a different matter. They suggest to the Pentagon's Kremlin-watchers that the Soviets have embarked on a policy of challenging the United States for control of the world's oceans.